Woolf Research Strategy 2027–2030

Accelerating Discovery for Human Flourishing

2026

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1. Introduction to the 2027–2030 theme by the President of Woolf

The overall strategic direction of Woolf is defined by the Woolf Mission Statement. The Woolf Research Strategy sets out the strategic direction for research, including research-based teaching.

The 2027–2030 theme is *Accelerating Discovery for Human Flourishing*. This theme reflects both continuity and evolution. Woolf's 2023–2026 research strategy, *The Future of Human Flourishing during Technological and Social Change*, established Woolf's commitment to understanding and shaping the conditions of human flourishing in a period of profound transformation. The 2027–2030 strategy retains that commitment but marks a shift in orientation: from studying technology's impact on flourishing to actively harnessing artificial intelligence as an instrument for accelerating discovery itself.

We are likely entering a civilisation-altering change, perhaps the most significant since the printing press or the industrial revolution. Higher education institutions predated the invention of the printing press, but they thrived by embracing it. The printed word created a new architecture for how ideas were created, distributed, governed, and learned by students. Artificial intelligence appears to be creating a comparable new architecture for how ideas will be created, distributed, managed, and learned. AI, alongside related developments in robotics and automation, will also reshape the world of work, and higher education institutions will need to prepare students for that world.

This moment presents an opportunity for higher education institutions to regain a position of deep relevance to their students. By making artificial intelligence central to their strategy, institutions can reduce administrative costs, accelerate research, improve teaching quality, personalise learning, and prepare students for the world of the future instead of the past. But this requires a genuine strategy, not merely the superficial reactions that characterise much of the sector. Some campuses ban chatbots and others buy licensed seats, but neither amounts to a strategy.

None of this is to suggest that the path forward is obvious or that speed alone is a virtue. The integration of AI into research and teaching raises questions that require genuine wisdom, sustained ethical deliberation, and open discussion across disciplinary boundaries. How knowledge is produced, how it is verified, how it is taught, and who benefits from it are not technical questions with technical answers. They are human questions, and a research strategy that fails to take them seriously will not serve human flourishing regardless of how much it accelerates discovery. Woolf's approach is therefore to move with both ambition and care: to embrace these tools while insisting on the institutional conversation necessary to use them well.

This research strategy proceeds from a practical observation: every faculty member now has access to research capabilities backed by substantial computational investment. Discovery can accelerate across every discipline, but only if research is deliberately redesigned to take advantage of these tools. Methodologies need to be rebuilt not just for current capabilities, but assuming rapid improvements. Institutions must treat data as strategic infrastructure: instrumenting research, curating proprietary datasets, and

structuring inquiry so that AI meaningfully amplifies discovery. This demands greater ambition in what we attempt, and greater discipline in what we choose not to pursue.

Woolf, as a global collegiate higher education institution with nearly 1,000 faculty members (experts ranging from philosophy and psychoanalysis to artificial intelligence and computational methods in human biology) is well placed to pursue this agenda. Our collegiate structure gives us exceptional breadth, while our institutional commitment to interdisciplinarity gives us the capacity to connect insights across domains in ways that monolithic institutions often cannot.

At Woolf, we are not theorising about this future; we are building it. Over the past several years, we have developed deep institutional expertise and a purpose-built technical infrastructure that applies AI to the core functions of university governance and administration at scale. We are still early in the journey, but the direction is clear. We invite those with the ambition to shape the next architecture of higher education to join us.

Sincerely,

Joshua Broggi, PhD
President, Woolf

2. Accelerating Discovery for Human Flourishing

The world is undergoing a transformation in the production and distribution of knowledge, perhaps the most significant since the invention of the printing press. Artificial intelligence, encompassing large language models, machine learning systems, and autonomous agents, is not simply a new set of tools. It may represent a new architecture for how ideas are created, tested, disseminated, and applied. Advances in adjacent fields, including robotics, are also likely to reshape labour markets and raise important questions about the role of human work in a flourishing life.

Woolf's research agenda for 2027–2030 is organised around a central proposition: that these capabilities, if deliberately and wisely harnessed, can meaningfully accelerate the pace and expand the scope of scholarly discovery in service of human flourishing. This is an institutional commitment to redesigning research practice, pedagogical method, and scholarly infrastructure so that Woolf and its colleges are positioned to realise this potential. It is also a commitment to proceeding with the ethical seriousness and intellectual humility that a transformation of this magnitude warrants. The pace of change makes deliberation harder, not less necessary.

2.1 Continuity and evolution from 2023–2026

The 2023–2026 research strategy asked how human flourishing could be preserved and advanced amid rapid technological and social change. That question remains vital. But the pace of development in AI invites a more active posture. The relevant question is no longer only what is happening to human flourishing but how can these tools be directed to advance it. The 2027–2030 strategy therefore represents an evolution from analysis to acceleration: retaining the normative commitment to flourishing while embracing AI as a primary means of pursuing it.

Human flourishing, understood as the conditions under which individuals and communities can develop their capacities, exercise meaningful agency, and lead lives of purpose, remains the orienting aim. What changes is the institutional stance: Woolf will treat AI not merely as an object of inquiry but as foundational infrastructure for the research enterprise itself.

2.2 Three central challenges

Realising the potential of AI-accelerated research requires Woolf to confront three interconnected challenges. These are structural problems that, if left unaddressed, will shape whether the potential of this moment is realised. They are also, in each case, questions that call for ethical reflection and open faculty discussion, not merely technical solutions.

Challenge 1: Pedagogical transformation in conditions of radical technological flux.

Faculty across every discipline face a challenge with few clear historical precedents: they must teach effectively in an environment where the instruments of inquiry available to their

students are evolving faster than any curriculum cycle can accommodate. The difficulty is not simply that faculty must “learn to use AI.” It is that the epistemological foundations of instruction are being tested. What it means to demonstrate mastery, to set an appropriate assessment, to distinguish genuine understanding from fluent reproduction: all of these pedagogical judgments must be renegotiated when students have access to tools that can generate competent text, code, analysis, and even provisional hypotheses on demand.

This challenge is compounded by the pace of change: a teaching method redesigned for the capabilities of one semester may be inadequate by the next. Woolf must therefore invest not in static faculty training programmes but in building a culture and infrastructure of continuous pedagogical adaptation, equipping faculty to teach in conditions of technological flux, rather than training them for a fixed technological state. In parallel, Woolf’s central administration will support faculty and students by using its advanced administrative systems to help students identify areas of strength and weakness as they progress against intended learning outcomes and deepen their competencies. We expect both learning and research to personalise, and the overall quality bar to be raised.

Challenge 2: The threshold of epistemic contribution: redefining the standard of student work.

When AI systems can produce work that meets a conventional standard of competence (a passable essay, a functional analysis, a credible literature review), the question of what constitutes a genuine intellectual contribution by a student becomes pressing and conceptually demanding. This is what we term the problem of the epistemic contribution threshold: the minimum standard at which student work demonstrates authentic understanding, original synthesis, and critical judgment rather than facility with tool-assisted reproduction.

The analogy to calculators is instructive. The introduction of calculators into mathematics education did not lower the bar; it shifted expectations upward toward conceptual reasoning, proof construction, and problem formulation. The arithmetic that calculators automated was no longer the locus of intellectual value. Analogously, AI should not lower expectations for student work but substantially raise them. A student who can direct AI to synthesise fifty peer-reviewed articles in five languages for a Tuesday essay is not working at a diminished level; they are being held to a standard of scope and judgment previously reserved for advanced researchers. The challenge is to define, across every discipline, what the new threshold of meaningful contribution looks like, and to design curricula that support students in reaching it.

Woolf’s research agenda will therefore include sustained inquiry into the design of assessment, curriculum, and pedagogical practice in an AI-mediated educational environment, not as a peripheral concern but as a question close to the integrity of the academic enterprise.

Challenge 3: Methodological absorptive capacity: closing the gap between available and realised research acceleration.

The computational tools now available to researchers represent a significant expansion of investigative capability. Yet the primary determinant of whether this capability translates into actual research acceleration is not the technology itself but the researcher's capacity to assimilate and apply it. Drawing on the concept of absorptive capacity from innovation economics (the ability of an organisation to recognise the value of new information, assimilate it, and apply it to productive ends), we identify the core bottleneck as what might be called methodological absorptive capacity: the researcher's ability to reformulate questions, redesign workflows, and integrate computational tools into disciplinary practice in ways that genuinely amplify discovery rather than merely automate existing routines.

The gap between the research acceleration available through AI and the research acceleration actually realised is, in the first instance, a gap in researcher preparedness. But preparedness here should not be understood narrowly as technical proficiency. It encompasses the capacity to reconceive research problems in light of new capabilities, to exercise judgment about which tasks benefit from AI augmentation and which do not, and to maintain the epistemic standards of one's discipline while working at a pace and scale that those standards were not originally designed to govern. Closing this gap requires systematic institutional investment in researcher development: not one-off training sessions but an ongoing programme of methodological capacity-building that treats AI fluency as a core scholarly competence.

2.3 Research focal points and orienting questions

Rather than prescribing topics, Woolf will use a set of orienting questions that every college will be encouraged to consider and interpret through its own objects of study and methods:

- **Discovery and method:** How should research methodologies be redesigned, across disciplines, to take full advantage of AI capabilities, both current and anticipated?
- **Data as infrastructure:** How should institutions instrument research, curate datasets, and structure inquiry so that AI meaningfully amplifies discovery?
- **Pedagogy and assessment:** How should teaching, curriculum design, and assessment evolve when students have access to powerful AI tools, and when the workforce they enter will expect fluency with them?
- **Work, labour, and automation:** How will AI and automation, including emerging developments in robotics, reshape labour markets, professional identities, economic structures, and the meaning of human work?
- **Agency and governance:** How should accountability, oversight, and legitimacy be structured when AI systems mediate decisions that affect human lives?
- **Cognition and knowledge:** How do intelligent systems affect what people can reliably know, how they reason, and what epistemic standards should govern AI-augmented inquiry?
- **Culture, identity, and creativity:** How do these systems change language, narrative, artistic practice, and the conditions of creative work?

- **Wellbeing and human development:** What are the effects of pervasive intelligent systems on mental health, education, and human development across the lifespan?
- **Risk, security, and resilience:** How do we prevent misuse of AI systems and manage the systemic fragilities they may introduce?

Woolf will encourage pluralism in theory and method (quantitative, qualitative, historical, interpretive, experimental, computational, design-based, artistic, and mixed methods) while supporting rigorous standards appropriate to each discipline.

3. Dedicated Support for Woolf's Research and Teaching in Intelligent Systems and Technology

Today, Woolf has research and teaching strengths in computer science and adjacent fields, including data science, artificial intelligence, and the use of computation in developing knowledge of human biology. Through to 2030, Woolf will focus on augmenting research capacity, strengthening the interplay between research and teaching, and building a comprehensive inter-collegiate research environment that bolsters existing research communities across Woolf.

Woolf recognises that research should be deliberately redesigned to take advantage of AI-enabled tools. Methodologies across disciplines need to be rebuilt not merely for current capabilities but on the assumption of rapid improvement. Woolf will invest in the technical and institutional conditions that make this possible, including shared data architectures, computational research support, and frameworks for responsible data stewardship.

As part of this, Woolf will provide assistance and guidance on funding as well as make available institutional funding for research that advances AI-accelerated discovery and human flourishing, including:

- **Research methodology and AI integration:** systematic study of how disciplinary research methods can be redesigned to incorporate AI tools, including programmes to build methodological absorptive capacity among faculty.
- **Data infrastructure and curation:** investment in institutional data architectures, proprietary dataset development, and frameworks that treat data as strategic research infrastructure.
- **Automation and autonomous systems:** research into the societal implications of AI-driven automation, including emerging robotics, and their effects on labour markets, industrial processes, and human-machine collaboration.
- **Human-centred system design:** interfaces and interaction models that support comprehension, calibration, and control.
- **Evaluation and auditing:** methods to test reliability, bias, failure modes, and downstream effects.
- **Human capacity and potential:** research aimed at extending the human lifespan, adapting to climate change, improving cognition, and related aims, particularly where

AI tools can accelerate progress.

- **Transparency and interpretability:** where feasible, technical and socio-technical approaches to explainability and contestability.
- **Privacy and data governance:** architectures that support consent, minimisation, and user sovereignty.
- **Robustness and security:** defences against manipulation, adversarial behaviour, and unsafe deployment.
- **Alignment and safety:** approaches to reduce harmful behaviours and unintended optimisation.

4. Dedicated Support for Woolf's Research and Teaching in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Business

Today, Woolf has strengths across the humanities and business (e.g., Philosophy, Theology, Psychoanalysis, Interdisciplinary Studies; and in Business: international business, entrepreneurship, and the innovation economy).

In 2027–2030, Woolf will expand and deepen support for scholarship that examines how AI-accelerated discovery bears on human flourishing, including:

- **Philosophy, ethics, and theology:** responsibility, dignity, moral agency, and the normative limits of automation and autonomous decision-making, including the ethics of AI-augmented research practice itself.
- **Law and politics:** legitimacy, rights, due process, and institutional design for AI-mediated decision-making.
- **Education:** pedagogical transformation in AI-shaped contexts, including the design of assessment and curricula that raise the epistemic contribution threshold; the implications of AI-enabled personalised learning; and the development of faculty capacity to teach in conditions of rapid technological change.
- **Business studies:** organisational decision-making, labour market transitions driven by AI and automation, productivity, inequality, the future of professional work, and the economics of AI-augmented innovation.
- **History, culture, and the arts:** how intelligent systems reshape cultural production, historical method, creative practice, and the conditions under which meaning is made and transmitted.

5. General Support

Woolf provides members with access to substantial library resources and will continue to develop its library services in a manner integrated with research needs and instructional design. As AI tools become central to scholarly work, Woolf will ensure that library and information services are developed with an AI-first orientation, supporting researchers and

students in navigating, curating, and critically evaluating the expanding landscape of AI-mediated information.

Woolf supports faculty-initiated grant applications and will continue strengthening grant enablement through an institutional research grant function, including the provision of scholarships and stipends that support research engagement. Woolf will prioritise funding pathways that support the development of methodological absorptive capacity across disciplines, recognising that the ability to integrate AI into research practice is now a core scholarly competence.

A key area of growth during the 2027–2030 period will be research dissemination and impact. Woolf supports dissemination through research profiles and will strengthen institutional capacity for tracking outputs and promoting research findings, including via a publishing pathway.

As Woolf continues to develop its institutional standing and doctoral programmes, it will also develop clearer recognition pathways for research and teaching excellence, including professorial evaluations.

Underpinning all of Woolf's general support is the recognition that every student will enter a workforce where they are expected to use AI to accomplish nearly every task. Woolf will therefore invest in ensuring that students develop both a critical understanding of how these tools work and the ability to use them effectively. This means raising the bar on student work rather than lowering it: the infrastructure described above (library services, grant enablement, dissemination capacity, and recognition pathways) will be developed to prepare students for the world of the future instead of the past.